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Union of South Africa

Sighting of Submarine

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South African press.

This report quotes three news articles in the Cape Town press concerning a submarine sighting off the Tugela River mouth on 19 March 1953. Articles quote Admiralty spokesman as being satisfied that sighting was a submarine. Press links sighting with Soviet commercial tankers and whaling ships in Cape area.

1. Three articles appearing in The Cape Argus for 21 March 1953 are quoted as follows:

"Mystery 'Sub' is believed to be Soviet. All ships asked to keep sharp lookout. There is no doubt now that the mysterious vessel seen about four miles off the Tugela River mouth last Thursday was a submarine, and there is little doubt that it was Soviet.

An Admiralty spokesman at Simonstown said to-day: 'After consulting with the Union defense authorities and making a most thorough investigation we are absolutely satisfied that it was a submarine. There is no question of it having been anything else.'

The submarine was sighted by a pilot of the South African Air Force Special Reserve of Flying Officers. After taking observations he approached. It crash-landed immediately.

The submarine was a large one. It carried no identification marks and was not flying an ensign.

When the pilot landed he made a detailed report. The information was transmitted to Pretoria, and the Admiralty at Simonstown were informed.

Consultations

Consultations between senior officers of the U D F and the Admiralty took place, and some of these officers themselves interviewed the pilot.

When it was decided that there was no room for doubt that a submarine had been very near Cape Town, a check was made

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to ascertain whether it could have been a unit of a Commonwealth or a North Atlantic Treaty Organization navy.

When they were satisfied that this was most unlikely, the U D F and the Admiralty agreed to issue a statement merely saying that the submarine was 'unidentified.'

Special Watch

It is reported that British and South African ships have been asked to keep a special watch and report to the authorities any submarines they may sight.

No sightings have been reported other than that off the Natal coast.

Naval experts are agreed that if the submarine was not a Commonwealth or a N A T O one it could only have been Soviet.

No other country has submarines that could voyage so far from friendly bases.

The Soviets are known to have at least 36 war-built craft (15 of them taken from the Germans after World War II) that could easily make such a voyage. In addition, she is believed to have many more, completed since World War II, that could so so.

Carry Mines

All these crafts are fitted with the 'snort,' a device that enables them to travel submerged for long periods. Most of them are fitted for mine-laying.

Soviet long-range submarines are based in the White Sea, the Baltic, the Black Sea and at Vladivostock. Many of them could reach South African waters from any of these areas.

It is likely that submarines voyaging between European USSR and Vladivostock would use the Cape route as being the one on which they would be least likely to attract attention.

Refuel at Sea

If they have to refuel en route there are a fairly large number of Soviet commercial tankers (all, of course, State owned) operating on all oceans from which they could be supplied.

For the last three months the Soviet whaling factory-ship Slava has also been operating not very far from the Cape, and Soviet tankers have been operating a ferry service between the whaling ship and the Black Sea." (UNCLASSIFIED)

"Top-Secret Talks on Submarine in Pretoria. Defense Headquarters today issued the following announcement on the sighting of a foreign submarine off the Natal coast last week:

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'The Department of Defense announces that an unidentified submarine was sighted by an Active Citizen Force officer of the South African Air Force approximately four miles to seaward of the Tugela River, north of Durban, on Thursday, March 12.

'The Pilot closed and investigated the submarine before she crash-dived. The defense authorities, after a thorough examination, are satisfied that the report made by this officer is authentic.

Flying No Flag

'At the time of sighting the submarine was not flying an ensign and her name could not be read. The defense authorities have no knowledge of any Commonwealth or N A T O submarines operating in the area.'

Top-secret conferences were held today in Pretoria between the Chief of the General Staff (Lt. Gen. C L de Wet du Toit) and the Naval and Marine Chief of Staff (Commodore H H Bierman). The Admiralty and the South African authorities are working in the closest touch and reports will be exchanged." (UNCLASSIFIED)

"City Guns To Fire at 'Sub.' An anti-submarine firing practice will be carried out at 9 am on Monday with the gun at the entrance to the Duncan Dock.

A five-gallon drum will represent the conning tower of a submarine.

Fort Wynyard battery will carry out a shoot at 9:30 am, and a night shoot at 8 pm. Road traffic in front of the battery will be halted during the shoots.

People living near the battery are advised to keep their windows open during the firings." (UNCLASSIFIED)

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